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NOTE FOR: All NIC Personnel

The "Intelligence-Policymaker Tangle" is one of those rare articles which hits home about once a paragraph. It's author, Yehoshafat Harkabi, once served as David Ben-Gurion's intelligence chief. Now he's Chairman of Hebrew University's International Relations Department; he also delivers lectures on intelligence to Israeli officers. Harkabi's Jerusalem apartment is a popular stop among executives, scholars, journalists, and so forth who travel through the Mid East. Should you ever want to meet Harkabi, just let me know.

HEM

Herbert E. Meyer
VC/NIC

Attachment

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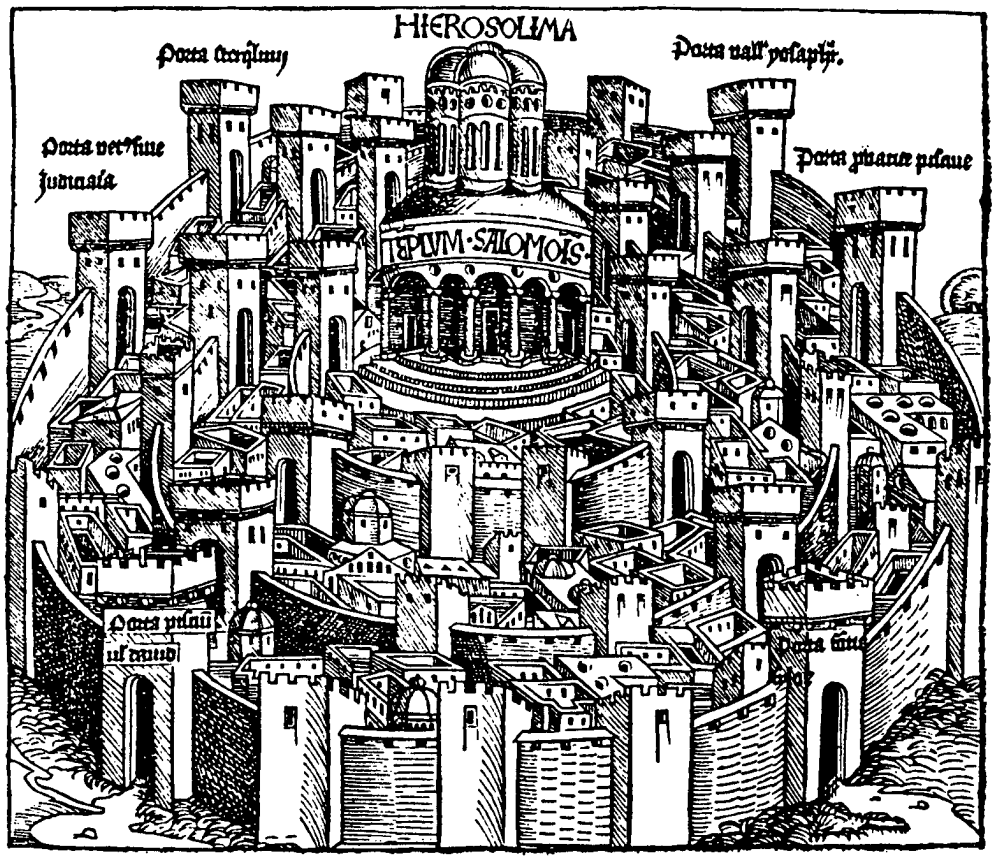

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The Intelligence-Policymaker Tangle

Yehoshafat Harkabi

The publication of the Kahan Commission report, with its indictment of the IDF Intelligence Chief, reopened the debate on the relationship between the Intelligence services and their clientele, the policymakers. The formal description of how Intelligence supplies the policymakers with information and evaluations as a basis for molding policy is simplistic and incomplete. The relations between these echelons are complex and tension-ridden, as is evident when one looks beyond formal hierarchical structures and processes at the influence of informal relations on the workings of administrative bodies.

The study of the functioning of Intelligence services, which has greatly developed in recent years, does not focus only on how the Intelligence service produces its reports – information gathering and analysis. It also deals with the crucial area where the usefulness of the service is put to trial; namely, the transmittal of the Intelligence service's product to the policymaking bodies, the 'interface' between Intelligence and policy.

Intelligence is not an autonomous operation whose *raison d'être* lies in itself. Intelligence activities depend on having a clientele to serve. However, its clients are not necessarily receptive to Intelligence, for what they often look for is not so much data on the basis of which to shape policy but rather support for pre-formed political and ideological conceptions. The Intelligence service finds

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itself in difficult straits, for it is aware that many of its efforts will not be utilized or appreciated, and the use made of its assessments and reports will differ from its expectations. Matters get worse the more ideologically motivated is the regime, for then policy is made more on the basis of ideological inputs than on the basis of Intelligence reportings on reality, which to the extent that they contradict the ideology may be discarded, and the Intelligence service ends up frustrated.

Policy can be judged according to the extent of its 'sensitivity' to Intelligence – will it change if a certain evaluation requires such a change? As a concrete example, what Intelligence reporting could induce a change in Israel's present policy on Judea and Samaria? Does the rigidity of a political position make it impervious to Intelligence? An ideological regime may revel in exotic covert Intelligence operations, encourage them, and still keep Intelligence evaluations at arm's length. Nor is there simple transitivity between the quality of the Intelligence and the quality of policy. Good Intelligence is no guarantee of good policy and vice versa. Even if Intelligence portrayed reality correctly and its evaluations were accepted, policy also includes other components, such as goals, objectives, and assumptions about causal relations between policy and outcomes, which are not necessarily Intelligence products.

Policymakers too have their legitimate complaints against Intelligence, claiming that it supplies them with a motley catchall collection of information, containing everything but what is needed at the time; or that it expresses itself in equivocal and reserved language that leaves them perplexed; or still worse, that its evaluations are not reliable and excessively opinionated.

The Intelligence service should enter the policymaking process twice: first, by providing data and assessments of the situation, which will contribute to the shaping of policy; and secondly, after the policy has been formulated, Intelligence should also evaluate the likely reactions of adversaries and third parties to that policy and its success or failure. However, it often happens that statesmen refrain from seeking the Intelligence service's opinion on this, for basic reasons. For by making such a request of the Intelligence they elevate it to the position of judging their policy. Thus a tangle is created whereby the Intelligence arm which is a subordinate body, becomes an arbiter, a kind of supervisor over its masters. What is more, the statesmen may harbor suspicions that the Intelligence services may cite the difficulties and weaknesses of their policy. Not fortuitously has the Intelligence service been dubbed 'negativistic', a discouraging factor, for it may tend more to point to drawbacks than call attention to opportunities. Hence, Kissinger stigmatized the Intelligence service for pushing towards 'immobilism'.

The Intelligence service itself will not volunteer for the role of

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policy-monitoring, fearing that it may mar its relations with its superiors, the policymakers, and may cause it to collide with conceptions sacred to them, or with their dreams. For example, once the idea of getting the Phalanges into action in Beirut became a desire, almost an obsession, among the Israeli policy-makers, a presentation of the hazards of such a policy placed the Intelligence in an uncomfortable position. Similarly, it may be supposed that an organization like the KGB would be inhibited from presenting evaluations that clash with Marxism and with Soviet policy. The Intelligence service, therefore, will not volunteer to serve as a traffic signal light flashing red and green alternately to the advancing policy carriage.

There is an exaggerated tendency to present the Intelligence service as if it were an institution for the sounding of tocsins. The Intelligence service is primarily an institution for the provision of information which is meant to lead to knowledge and understanding, and is not merely a warning mechanism. The principal line of defense against surprises is 'understanding', not 'warning'. Warning is in order in times of emergency and before the onset of calamity – but those are few and far between. And if indeed the Intelligence service is expected to warn about impending dangers stemming from an action initiated by the *enemy*, it is hard to expect that it also be an institution that warns against the injurious outcomes of our own policy, or our home-made surprises. That is an important difference, which it seems, the Kahan Commission was not alive to. Certainly the Intelligence service would do well were it itself, on its own, to point out the probable consequences of policy, but it is advisable that the chiefs-of-state understand the Intelligence's reluctance to become overseers, august or meek, on their policy and address it with explicit queries, as an invitation for the Intelligence's intervention. People are not aware of how complicated and difficult is the Intelligence service's work of collecting, analyzing and evaluating information. The Intelligence service will not willingly seek out additional troubles for itself. It is not sheer squeamishness.

In short, the Intelligence service is an institution more for the giving of answers than for sounding warnings, especially about our policy. It is the task of the leaders to put questions to it, and if they do not ask, let it not be said that they assumed that the service would inform them of its own accord. True, since the Intelligence service provides reports on an ongoing routine basis, the impression might be formed that it offers its opinions on every relevant issue automatically. That is an error, and it would have been helpful to Israeli policymaking had the Kahan Commission been alert to it and drawn attention to these aspects.

It may be argued that the Intelligence service does not fully discharge its duty by providing the policymakers with information and assessments, and that precisely because its product may be

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critical for policy, the service must see to it that its reports are properly understood. However, the Intelligence service will refrain from testing whether the policymakers have properly understood the material that has been passed on to it, that it will shrink from taking the role of a pedantic teacher correcting misunderstandings on the part of the policymakers. Indeed, a pretension on the part of the Intelligence service to be the policymakers' 'mentor' is liable to be counterproductive.

It may come to pass that senior Intelligence functionaries may differ with the policymakers' policy. Their critical stance *vis-à-vis* the adopted policy may be based on an evaluation of the historical trend, yet they may not be able to adduce factual proof for their position. In most instances, the error of the policy line emerges in a clearly decisive way only in the long range, for the feedback circuit in such matters is slow. In the short range a mistaken policy line does not necessarily entail outcomes that refute it. It may then appear to the policymakers that their course is succeeding, and that the facts abet it. Hence, the Intelligence service cannot use such facts to validate its criticism of policy, for in a confrontation with the policymakers it can avail itself only of facts whose message is clear and evident; and thus its assessments of long-range trends may not, in such cases, be serviceable for it. The Intelligence criticism of policy may then appear as arbitrary and irksome, even as stemming from lack of sympathy towards the policymakers themselves. Thus, here too, the Intelligence service may choose to withhold counsel. Later, when the error of the policy becomes clear, there will be those who will protest that the Intelligence service should have warned in time about the mistaken policy, and an inquiry commission may even find the service culpable.

The Intelligence service is aware that it treads on precarious ground and is liable to be singled out for blame in any error, since in every political or military decision there is an assumption on the situation or a component of knowledge, the lack of which can be imputed to Intelligence. For instance, a commander can decide to outflank and attack from the left, not because the Intelligence service advised him to do so. Were decisions based only on Intelligence data, decisions and policy would simply 'follow' from it and there would be no need for policymakers. If his attack fails, the commander can shift the blame to Intelligence by contending that it did not warn him that the left flank was strong and could not be crushed. Any military action can fail, either because our troops were not good or because the enemy's troops were. There is no institutionalized body whose job is to evaluate our troops, and thus it is easy to transfer the blame for a military failure to Intelligence, which, as it were, slighted the enemy's ability. The Intelligence service has been frequently described as the staff's 'whipping boy'. Thus, the Intelligence service is usually a frightened institution.

In many fields a human error of evaluation or judgement is

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considered as extenuating circumstances; however, it is the fate of Intelligence that its error of evaluation is always enshrined in its bill of indictment. Whereas the popular saying has it that 'to err is human', an almost superhuman perfection is expected of Intelligence. We are living among our own people with no problems of accession to knowledge and still are stunned by domestic political developments. But if Intelligence does not successfully forecast a political denouement in a foreign country, brows are wrinkled: how is that possible? What inefficiency!

After the Intelligence service has failed in reporting on some information or evaluation, it is likely to take out insurance for itself by way of enlarging the quantity of its reports and including everything in them, so that it may not be found wanting in reporting. It will then flood the policymakers with Intelligence reports. However, over-reporting may be detrimental for the Intelligence service influence as important items may be lost in the multitude of the less important and trivial ones. True, what will eventually prove important does not always immediately catch the eye. The statesmen may be able to defend themselves against overabundance of Intelligence reporting, by employing an aide to sift and summarize the material for them. Such an aide fills the role of 'Intelligence waiter' who marks for his superior what is worth his attention. What is significant in the eyes of the 'Intelligence waiter' and the Intelligence service is not necessarily identical. Despite the vital role such an assistant fulfils for his master, such an intermediary arrangement may also complicate things, for the Intelligence service does not know what information has reached the policymakers, of what they are aware and of what not. Furthermore, statesmen may tend to look or rather browse over Intelligence material, often at the end of an exhausting day when they are fatigued or half drowsy.

Presumably, it is good that the chief of the Intelligence service be on close terms with the policymakers and have their trust. However, such bosom companionship too has its drawbacks. True, the more he is a part of the inner Byzantine court that develops as a matter of course around state chiefs, the greater is his influence; however, he then also loses perspective and his independent critical vision, and gradually succumbs to the conceptions of the policymakers. He is then unable to detach himself from festivities of policymaking just like the other self-gratified members of the court who bask in their connections with power. Thomas Hughes urged that Intelligence should give the policymakers 'utmost support with utmost reservation'. That surely is no simple combination.

In its reports the Intelligence service must differentiate between statements of fact and evaluations concerning the future, which are always a matter of conjecture. It is an error to present an evaluation of future trends as if they were facts. The desire of the

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Intelligence people to present a clearcut unqualified opinion is commendable, but it may mislead them to present their hypotheses about the future developments as if they were foregone conclusions and final judgements not to be disputed. In reporting evaluations one should not transcend the amount of certitude the data warrants, and even the probable should not be offered as the absolutely certain. The Intelligence service should not be inhibited from making the policymakers privy to the uncertainties of evaluation, especially regarding future important developments, tendencies and intentions. The more the service does that, the more the policymakers will understand the quandaries and limitations of the Intelligence services and will not nurture expectations that cannot be met and which in the end may be counterproductive for both policy and Intelligence.

The Intelligence service is judged according to the final quality or significance of its output – its reports. The words of our Sages in *Pirkei Avot*, 'according to the pains so is the reward', do not apply to Intelligence. The toils involved in obtaining the information on which the reports are based have low visibility, and the Intelligence service is prevented from talking about them or from recounting its woes. But without information collection, there is no Intelligence evaluation. In fact, in Intelligence most of the efforts in manpower and resources go to information collection. If those efforts, and the efforts to extract evaluations from the information are not appreciated, feelings of bitterness will develop in the service, as if the policymakers, and even the country as a whole, are ungrateful. These feelings swell when the Intelligence people compare the sophistication and advanced methods employed in collection of the information and the production of Intelligence against the cavalier fashion or improvisation with which policy decisions are many a time reached.

The Intelligence service is represented to the policymakers by its director. He participates (if invited) in meetings or caucuses at which important decisions are made. However, as an individual he cannot provide an exhaustive representation of, or reflect the knowledge and wisdom that has accumulated in his institution. However broadminded and gifted he may be, it is one of the tragic ironies of Intelligence that its chief may constitute a 'bottleneck' who detracts from the quality of his service, thus unwittingly deflating its value and its impact. The consumer of Intelligence must understand that and therefore pay heed to the institutional reports and not only to what comes directly from its chief's mouth.

Intelligence services in our world cost a great deal of money. The Israeli public has no idea how costly this service is. However, to the extent that the policymakers are not aware of how the Intelligence can be useful, and what its limitations are, and do not direct it and ask it questions expressly, the utility of Intelligence is partial and resources are wasted. The great outlays for Intelligence are

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justifiable only if the policy based on its information is of high quality. An unrealistic policy, whether autarkic or autistic, has no need for Intelligence and the Intelligence service cannot help it. Intelligence efforts are worthwhile only where they contribute to the shaping of a wise policy.

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